

Allegories of Representation: The Point of View

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Michel Foucault's now classic reading of Velazquez's painting *Las Meninas* provided him with leverage to lift up the heavy and rusted door onto a new era in the understanding of the history of knowledge, particularly in the vicissitude and relativity manifested itself as a change in representation. As you may recall his argument in the opening chapter of his *Les Mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things: an Archaeology of Human Sciences*) rested on a single point of interpretation: that the supposed mirror reflection of the royal couple at the back wall of the room is pivotal to the representational frame of the painting. Implicit to this point is another point that they are posing (to the dismay of an innocent viewer, at the position where the spectator of the painting stands) for their double portrait now being in progress on the reverse of the canvas whose back occupies a large area on the fore-left of the painting. The apparent paradox led Foucault to a new representation of representation. In other words,

It may be that, in this picture, as in all the representation of which it is, as it were, the manifest essence, the profound invisibility of what one sees is inseparable from the invisibility of the person seeing—despite all mirrors, reflections, imitations, and portraits. Around the scene are arranged all the signs and successive forms of representation. . . .(16)

The invisibility, the absence of the apparent center of all the action in the picture led Foucault to conclude that it is not possible for the pure felicity of the image ever to present in a full light both the master who is representing and the sovereign who is being represented.

But there. . . is an essential void: the necessary disappearance of that which is its foundation—of the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance. This very subject—which is the same —has been elided. And representation, freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, can offer itself as representation in its pure form. (Emphasis added. 16)

This elision betokens for the French thinker the emergence in what he calls the post-Renaissance, Classical age, of a new form of the order of things: the entire organization of signs which is no longer bound to what it marks by t

bonds of resemblance, but only by manifesting, simultaneously to its marking representing function, "the relations that Analogous to that interdependent relationship between the signifier and the signified — "the signifying element has no content...and no determination other than what it represents....this content is indicated only in a representation that posits itself as such...." — "the spatial and graphic representation...has not other content in fact than that which it represents, and yet that content is visible only because it is represented by a representation" (64). By this token, "An idea can be the sign of another, not only by representing it, but by a representation can be established between the signifier and the signified. A representation can always be represented within the idea that is representing." The interpenetrating analysis of representation and the theory of the sign show how "representation is at once peculiarly self-perpendicular to itself: it is at the intersection of its *direction of appearance* relation to an object and a manifestation of itself. From the Classical age, the sign is the representativity of the representation in so far as it is representable" (65)

Our question now is this: If this reading of the painting is shown to be at fault, as in fact it has been, would it affect his contention as to the turning of western consciousness from the Renaissance to the Classical period in the 17th century as outlined above?

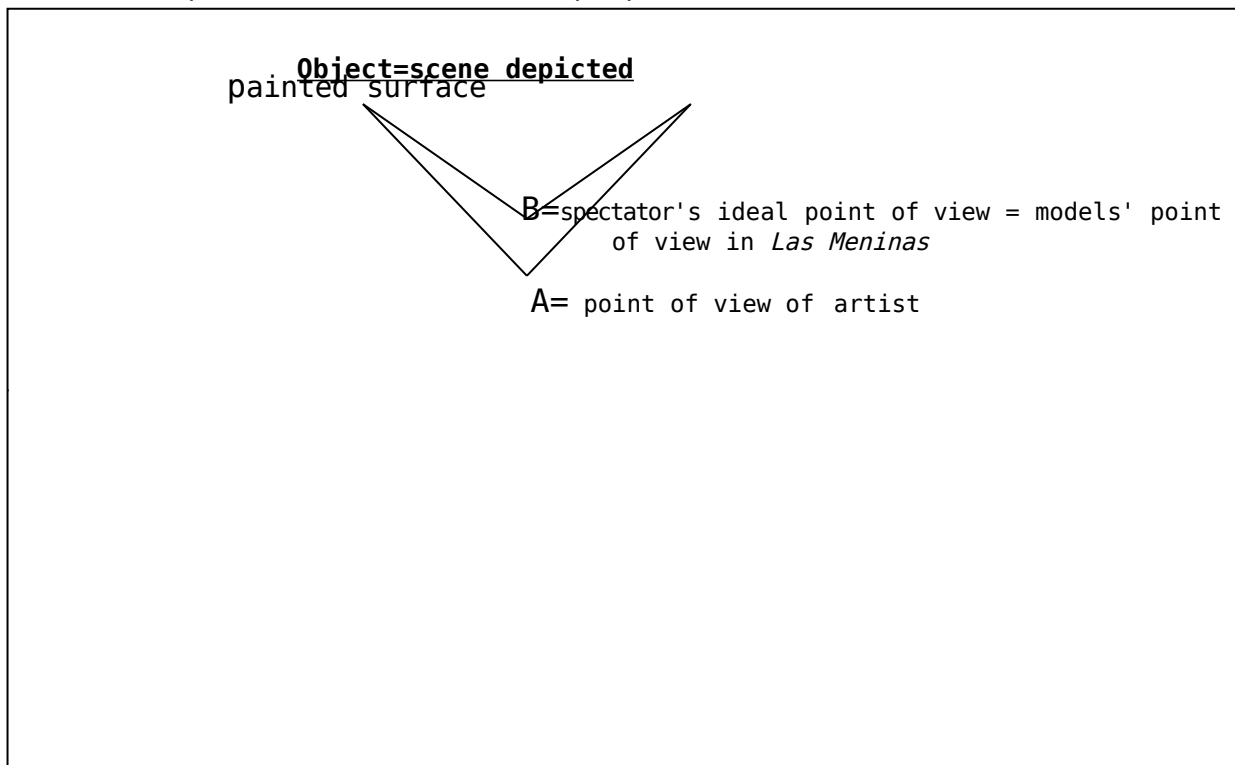
It was the co-authors of the clever article "Reflexions on Las Meninas: Paradox Lost" published in the Winter 1980 number of *Critical Inquiry* that put Foucault to shame by showing how the French thinker was at fault in his assumption that the painting in question was drawn from the theoretically impossible position of the sitter=observer before the picture plane. Joel Snyder and Ted Cohen seem to have refuted once and for all the claim of Foucault together with those of the American philosopher John Searle who had launched a theory involving the same assumptions

The points commonly held by both Foucault and Searle are as follows:

- a. The double image of the sovereigns is on a mirror on the back wall.
- b. They are reflected there because they stand before the picture plane of Las Meninas in order to be portrayed by the painter in the picture, namely Diego Velazquez himself.
- c. Their logically surmised position at B in the diagram above is in the same place as we the latter-day spectators occupy as we stand before Las Meninas.

d. The picture *Las Meninas* is depicted from this point of view of the model of the picture within the picture as well as that of the spectator of the picture *Las Meninas*, and not from the standard representational painter's position A. As a result this point B in front of the picture is to be occupied by three parties at the same time. Logically speaking it is a paradox, as is the classical axiom of representation.

In fact the refutation of Foucault is an indirect one, for the immediate target for Snyder=Cohen is John Searle's proposition about *Las Meninas* put forth in his article in the Spring 1980 *Critical Inquiry*: "*Las Meninas* and the Paradox of Pictorial Representation." Searle's proposition is a three-fold one:



1. The painting implies (or suggests, or indicates) that the king and queen are facing the depiction from before the picture plane.
2. The mirror reflects the persons of the king and queen.
3. The painting's point of view is opposite the mirror.

The counter argument of the co-authors of "Reflexions on the Paradox Lost" seems to be endowed with a scientific exactitude and therefore seems irrefutable. They simply show how these three points above are logically and geometrically relevant to each other and do not follow one another.

"Proposition 2 does not by itself imply 3" and "Proposition 1 implies neither 2 nor 3." The basic weakness of Foucault-Searle contention is the fact they failed to locate accurately the all-important point of view ~~itself~~ as a point of view. There cannot be any ambiguity nor equivocation as to the location of the point of view so far as the painting is or presents the illusion of, as Searle believed, an example of the classical representation.

Their argument looks as if constructed ~~indeed~~ step by step so as to be immune to any error or misconception. But is it really so? The first proposition is reached through the following steps:

x. A mirror in a painting could reflect objects shown to be in front of the picture plane without those objects being placed at the point of view.

y. The objects would only have to be placed at an angle from the mirror equal to the angle from the mirror to the point of view.

a. It is only if the angle from the mirror to the point of view is zero--that is, if the point of view is opposite the mirror--that the reflected objects must also be at zero angle from the mirror--that is, at the point of view.

Their second counter argument seems quite simple and firm: Even if the sovereigns are facing the depiction from before the picture plane, they could do so without being perpendicular to either the mirror or the point of view.

If Searle's proposition 1 (that the sovereigns are facing the depiction from before the picture plane), and proposition 2 (that the mirror reflects the persons of the sovereigns) are separately true, then why cannot the third proposition be true? Because the painting's point of view is not opposite the vanishing point of the perspective employed in the picture which is at the right elbow of the man standing on the steps outside the scene. Snyder-Cohen's figure 2 [reproduced by one way or another] with the VP unmistakably located implies what the French American philosopher of language failed to pinpoint, namely the point of view of the picture "exactly opposite this point at the distance in front of the picture from which the projection was established..." (435). The point is apparently not opposite the images of the monarchs on the back wall in the picture.

In fact it does not take any optical expertise like the one shown by Snyder and Cohen to locate the vanishing point, and therefore, the point of view of the Spanish painter's problematical work in question. Our interest is rather, as has been indicated at the outset of my present paper, whether the revelation of the exact location of the viewpoint of *Las Meninas* would have obliged Foucault to abandon his propositions as to the history of representation or at least modify them. But before we address ourselves to this central question, we have a few points to clear out of our way.

Snyder-Cohen shares three propositions with Searle:

α The king and queen are facing the depicted scene from the picture plane, although the co-apt to it some of it is considered **considerably to the right** to face the VP.

β What we see hanging on the back wall to the left of the doorway is a mirror, although as the source of reflection, the two parties radically differ from each other, the one believing it to be the persons of the sovereign couple, while the latter, the pictorial representation on the obverse of the canvas whose back faces the spectator.

γ Most of the figures in the painting are gazing at the king and queen who are supposed to be facing them on this side of the picture plane.

For Snyder and Cohen the king and the queen are there to be the models for the picture within the picture which is invisible. It is the only point on which their interpretation of *Las Meninas* converge with that of Foucault's. For Foucault they are posing for their double portrait, whereas for Snyder-Cohen there simply is not enough information to decide whether the picture is the double portrait of the monarchs or they are depicted as part of a larger composition. For the two it is sufficient to have demonstrated against Searle reflected double image of the king and queen cannot but be the better portion of the surface of the canvas facing the painter in the picture.

The demonstration by the pair seems to be impeccable at first reading it. At one crucial point, however, their proposition is an untenable one. In their Figure 2 quoted the line that extends from V.P. through M' to M'' together with other which is the horizon H.V.P. MH'R marks the rightmost region excluded from reflection on the supposed mirror at the back. The painter is clearly standing to the right of this area and therefore cannot help interfering in the monarch's reflection when looked at from the authentic point of view opposite the elbow of the other Velazquez if the source of the sovereign reflection was the canvas.



At a distance of about twelve feet from *Las Meninas*, the most likely distance from which the viewpoint was taken, the center of the source of reflection is right of center of the canvas upon which Velázquez is seen painting. It may seem that if this is so, then at least part of Velázquez's back should be reflected in the mirror. The diagram shows that the geometry of the painting precludes this. Velázquez is standing normally to the mirror (if he turned around in place he would

stare directly into the mirror). He has been placed just outside the angle of incidence, and so he cannot be reflected in the mirror as seen from the point of view. (441)

Here in the crucial reconstruction of the geometry of the painted space lies both the strength and the weakness of the specialists of optics. It depends on the uncertain distance of the feet of the painter from the canvas in the picture and the picture plane of *Las Meninas*. An equally plausible case may be posited that from the relative size of the painter against the attendants standing beside the fourth pillar from the visible end of the room, the painter should be standing in the position parallel to the fifth pillar on the right. In order for him to stand outside the line V.P.M'M'', he would have to be placed beyond the second pillar, that is farther than the two adult attendants from the front group. In terms of the rectangular distance from the picture plane projection, the actual position of the painter is between the king and the queen, dropping a courtier on the left and the nun and the man who is seen beside her. This would put him in the rectangular area marked X in the Fig. 2 above. If the royal images on the wall is that of a mirror reflecting them from the obverse of the canvas in the picture, then, the larger portion of the mirror would have shown the back of the painter in action. The hanged object on the wall cannot be a mirror. It must be a double portrait whose surface slightly lighted up by the faint light coming through the window between the first and second. This puts the period to any conjecture deducible from the fancy that the images on the wall are on the mirror. But still we have not proven anything about the surface of the canvas unseen from this side. Nor have we proven anything against the supposed presence of the royal couple on this side of the picture plane.

We have only a few evidences of a certain other fact no one has suggested so far. The painter's eye is cast downward to the direction not exactly that of the point of view opposite the elbow of the black-clad man. So is the eye of the ducking maid on the right. Unless ~~so~~ the ~~three~~ ^{two} are much shorter than the two, they could not have been gazing at them, at least at their head. The angle of the eye of the Infanta is all but horizontal and not more than 10° upward, while in the case of Mari-Barbola the court dwarf, the eye is almost level with the horizontal plane at the same direction as the eyes of the others. The object of the gazes of at least four people in the picture is ascertained shortly. Suffice it here to say they are looking into/at a mirror and not at the head of the King nor the Queen.

Incidentally, Searle, as many others, chooses to infer the painting in progress in the painting is no other than *Las Meninas* itself. They believe the de

canvas should be as large as that on which the actual Las Meninas is depicted, roughly 3 meters high and 2.7 meters wide. demonstrated the hypothetical mirror at the back reflected canvas, Searle's inference cannot stand.

One Japanese critic posits a large looking glass standing on this side of the picture plane facing the group of people, in front of which group of people are posing for the painter. The painter in the picture, no other than Velazquez himself, then, is working on the group portrait reflection. The finished picture known by us as Las Meninas does not manifest any feature of a mirror reflection, however. The depicted large paintings on the wall above the images of the King and Queen are The Allegory of Arachne by Rubens and Jordaens's The Contest between Apollo and Pan. From them we may fairly identify the venue of the painting as the long room (21m x 6 m) on the south-east corner of the ground floor of the Spanish Court, Al Casal [Cf. Figure 4 represented in one way or another]. Then we must admit that left and right are not reversed in the depicted room. So if it is the case, it would be difficult to maintain that the picture we see is depicted from a mirror reflection. The painter did re-reverse right and left in the painting.

The other difficulty concerns the positioning of the royal couple. They can but be present in front of the supposed large mirror to have their torsos reflected in the other, smaller mirror at the far end of the room. Why have they disappeared from the picture? There can be no explanation. Neither is there an explanation possible as to the reason why the mirror at the back wall failed to show neither the backs of the Infanta and the others or none of the reflections on the supposed large mirror facing it at a far distance caught the persons of King and Queen standing farther from it than the Infanta and the attendants all of whom are supposed to be posing in front of the mirror. If the proposition that the canvas in the picture is that of the painting it contains it is quite an attractive one to the Escheresque sensibility, there are too many obstacles for it to be plausible. There is one essential point, however, in the proposition which is worthy of contemplation: the involvement of another mirror in the scheme of Las Meninas.

My proposal involves a mirror of a modest size on this side of the picture plane. The artist in the picture is intent on the reflection of the Infanta on that mirror. The point of view of Las Meninas is on that mirror. You don't need a gigantic mirror to get the mirror view of a large area of space like the one we are shown in Las Meninas. If you stand close enough to the mirror, you get the reflected view of a much larger space than you would expect on a comparatively smaller space of the surface of the reflector even when it is not a convex mirror like the one employed by Van Eyck in the famous Arnolfini picture. In

words, the angles at the base of the said triangle is acute ordinary realist painter stands at position A in Searle's diagram above.

The said mirror stands on this side of the surface of the painting, as it were. The distance between the Infanta and the mirror is small so as to enable her to catch a wider range of objects behind her. As if a pinhole camera was set on the back of the mirror in front of which the Infanta Margarita poses, the painting is drawn from the vantage point which coincides with the surface of the mirror at the point where Margarita's eye catches her own reflection. The painter in the picture catches her reflected image. What seems to have slipped the notice of all the commentators so far of this painting by Diego Velasquez is the fact that not only is she facing a mirror but also the mirror is comparatively small in size. The scene is what can only be seen in the mirror by the princess and the few more people there. The crucial fiction of the painting involves how such a wide space is caught in the modest-sized mirror.

The most plausible conjecture about what is being drawn on the canvas in the picture is that it is the portrait of the young princess herself. A majority of the extant portraits of her are depicted from mirror reflections of the youthful royal sitter, probably in deference to her position as the precious daughter to the King and Queen who had lost their children early in their infancy or childhood with only a single exception. The artist is showing respect to the feeling of the king who might well be anxious that by being drawn in a picture the child might not be extracted.

In this particular instance, the Infanta is depicted as if direct from life, the way it reveals to the world how her portraits have been painted from a mirror image of hers. The self-portrait of the painter is also drawn from life, distinct from the normal self-portraits which are depicted as a mirror image with left and right reversed. But Velazquez himself had drawn a few self-portraits in different costumes as if cast as a role in a play, as in the Surrender of Breda just as Michelangelo left his own self-portrait in disguise in the Sistine fresco of the Last Judgement or Raphael his own in The Academy of Athens along with other contemporary personages. The famous Van Arnolfini and his bride — now at the National Gallery of London — Searle mentions it as a possible inspiration for Velazquez, for the Van Eyck painting was then in the Spanish Royal Collection. It is a halfway choice, for the painter's self-portrait is a reflection on the mirror, but he is cast as a witness to the wedding and not as the painter at work at Point A.

Here in Las Meninas the artist is drawn as the artist himself at work. The only possible logic that guarantees the realist plausibility except the one of the mirror-image picture is the one of an imaginary painter depicting the painter in the picture at action, from the point of view of the normal painter at Point A. A

self-portrait under the guise of a portrait by another. Examples of this type of the artist's presence in his own picture are Courbet's *L'Atelier du peintre*, allegorie réelle terminant une phase de sept années de sa vie artistique (1855), Vermeer's *Allegory of the Painting* or Salvador Dali's *Ecumenical Council* (1960). According to the conjecture by Foucault-Sea, *Las Meninas* this realist representational logic is barred by the fact that the said point of view of the imaginary painter outside and facing the depicted seems to be occupied by the sitter(s) of the picture-in-the-picture painted by the painter in the picture. In this interpretation two considerations do rest: that the subject of the picture-in-the-picture is the double portrait of the Royal couple; and that the couple is seen reflected on the mirror a little off the center of the painting in question as if hung on the back wall of the room. We have seen how this is not the case.

His self-portrait shows his head slightly turned to the right showing cheek and ear only. Or rather, the sitter stands with an angle to the right and does not face the canvas standing parallel to it as it were.

The supposed mirror in question must be supported by a leg at least and tilted upwards so the person of the short Infanta can be seen by the painter in the picture who is at work with her portrait from a vantage point a few feet higher simply because he is considerably taller than the princess however distant he stands from the princess and the mirror.

The painting is painted as if it is the transference of the scene caught in that mirror. If we suppose the surface of the mirror is pierced by the tiniest hole which lets the light through to a film set at the back, the picture is comparable to an enlarged positive printed on a huge piece of paper.

The apparent size of each object reflected and seen by the Infanta on the mirror (the negative of what we know by the name of *Las Meninas*) is relative to the distance from the mirror. The canvas, the frame and the leg look comparatively larger than any other objects in the scene. But it does not follow from this that the "original" canvas was that large vis-a-vis the other presences. It could be a medium size canvas not so dissimilar to the one Velazquez painted the portrait of Margarita in the same year as he produced *Las Meninas*.

The center of the picture is Margarita's eyes which is caught by the eyes of most of the rest of the party on the mirror. The reason why the maid of honor on her right is leaning a little toward the center of the room away from the wall on her left is that she has to come within the angle of vision of Margarita on the mirror. The maid is not bowing to the supposed presence of the royal sitters on this side of the picture, but to the Infanta in the mirror. The maid is dropping a courtesy to the eye of the young princess caught on the surface of the mirror as she is leaving to attend some other business led by the man in black who

stands on the steps holding up the drapery. Because of her distance from the mirror, she can be seen by the Infanta in the mirror only when she leans forward only a little so that probably the upper half of her face comes within the angle of Infanta's vision reflected on the mirror. The maid's reflection is not caught by her own eyes. It was sufficient for her to catch the reflection of the Infanta on the mirror. The way the maid in question is drawn as if she is taking care not to protrude far into the reflected scene on the mirror is also indicative of the nature of the painting in the picture. The Infanta is the object of the present as the object of the painter in the picture in the act of checking the progress of his work against the reflection of the object. The painter is similarly leaning into the angle of her vision in the mirror.

The court dwarf who is pleading with her left pointing finger is pleading to the Infanta to let her go: "Me, too?" The midget in front of her has his left foot on the dog who has just been roused from a peaceful doze taken away with the rest of the company if the Infanta allows them to go. The maid. The other maid who is holding a plate with a red handle is held by the Infanta or has just been released by the same hand may be taken away. For her position is apparently too cumbersome for the painter to carry on his work.

The two other people, the nun and the man standing by her are to stay on: they are staying through until the day's work is called off. The atmosphere in the room is a rather relaxed one about these people, betokening of the length of time in which the same positions have been held, the same activity had been pursued, but with sole exception: the intensity with which the Infanta stares at her own figure in the mirror in front with her back held very erect and with the liveliest of expression of all the extant portraits of hers by the hand of the same artist. A short break is now over and she is ready for another stint. From the way the dog must have been snoozing away at her feet until one moment ago, the dwarfs have been there for the length of the last stint at least.

Despite Searle's reading that the people in the picture are expressionless, my reading suggests as I have tried to show that the artist has caught with exquisite delicacy a dramatic turning point in the activity in the room. On one fine day, the activity being most inactive one on the part of the personage involved.

The realistic drama is there in the intensity of the inactive activity of the Infanta and all the rest counter-balance its intensity by the indifference exemplified by the midget's attitude and the way the two adult attendants are engaged in conversation assured of the distance out of the earshot of the royal sitter. The pose of the man in black is also relaxed. The attitude of each of the maid of honor is not as relaxed as those of the rest because they are in direct

contact with the prince whose seductiveness is so powerful that she catches on with them, as it were. The only ambiguity left to puzzle out from my way of reading the scene is in the relative function of these two girls. Are they both going away in a moment, or the one with the tray is to stay after shifting her position somewhere else in the room. If that is the case, she has just arrived with the refreshment for the infantile princess and to relieve the other maid who is dropping courtesy to bid a leave. The identity between the two girls in many ways betokens of the similarity of their function. This much is unambiguous.

The picture *Las Meninas*, then, is not painted from the "impossible" position of the spectator/sitter who are ourselves and the royal couple respectively, many including Foucault and Searle have been led to believe. It is not actually painted from the perspective/point of view of Margarita the contemplating on her own reflection on the mirror. The point of view is opposite the elbow of the man standing outside the room as if watching the whole scene. But the picture successfully gives the illusion as if the painting is painted from the point of view of the youthful princess who stands at the center of the composition and appropriately a little lower than the horizontal plane of the perspective. From her vantage point substantially below the level of the height of the mirror, she is destined to catch the upward view of the reflected. And thus the picture shows in a realistic way the unpleasant view of the dark ceiling and the obscure view of the upper wall in the back, all of which should distract the spectator's concentration perhaps. This indicates how the painter's interest was in revealing the real, if unpleasant, scene behind the beatified paintings like that of the Infanta Margarita itself. The ugly back of the canvas and the sleepy dog each metonymic token of such a reality as the boredom on the part of the happy courtiers who do not obviously enjoy being mobilized to beguile the boredom of the royal personages every time their portraits are painted. This in a sense, then, is a tribute from the painter to the poor attendants without whose assistance he cannot fulfill his mission. From the look on her face, the royal princess, on the other hand, does not seem to dislike an occasion like this one. She is aware she is the center of the small universe now, although she is physically prone to fatigue and is refreshed from time to time by the cool scented water or something just as she is now being served the red Bucaro of such drink by Maria Augustina Sarmiento. That she is not the true center is hidden from her own perception but is only suggested to those who can see how she (her eye) is neither at the vanishing point of the perspective nor opposite the point of view. The perspective scheme is intentionally arranged so as to deprive her of that privilege. The subject of the painting is the subject of that schematization. None other than the implied painterly subject can impose intentionality on the objects who did not and could

not come into the pictured world by their own accord. Neither can they go out of the scene of the painting. The depravity of the objects are epitomized by the court dwarf Mari-Barbola who is asking the Infanta in the mirror if she may go away with Isabel de Velasco who is curtsying to beg the leave. But the innocent and ignorant Infanta is infatuated with her own reflection in the mirror and ignores the imploring Mari-Barbola. Nicolastito Pertusato, on his part, is rousing the dog to go away with. He is not pressing down the dog as has sometimes been thought. But he may not be granted the leave.

The semiotic significance of the painting lies, then, in the way the intrinsically neutral physical entities (including the eyes of the human subjects as well as the perspective illusion) are maneuvered into a system of signs. And the will of the implied painter is the primal mobile, as it were, to the system. So far as we could decipher this much of intentionality, we may go along with Foucault in saying *Las Meninas* is a representation of a representation. In other words, in a limited sense, we have proven the validity of Foucault's proposition in spite of the fact his reasoning of it was different from ours.

Snyder-Cohen's insight which has succeeded Foucault-Searle's paradoxistic reading of the pictorial text known as *Las Meninas*

We do not approach paintings in the way that we approach problems in surveying, and our perceptual capacities are not, by themselves, typically equipped to inform us when we are at the right point of view. The error made by Searle and Foucault in seeing *Las Meninas* is an acute illustration.

The co-authors of the perceptive article ask themselves if their demythologizing interpretation diminishes the greatness of *Las Meninas* now that the painting is not, after all, a paradox of self-reference (Snyder-Cohen's unconditioned representation as such (Foucault)). They believe it does not, for they are aware of the significance of the fact that even the monarchs are made by the painter to rely on the mirror reflection of the painterly representation of their presence to exert their sovereignty in the pictured universe. According to Snyder-Cohen, this is the reason behind the arrangement that neither the direct presentation of the persons of the monarchs nor their reflection on the mirror is avoided and replaced by the doubly reflexed mirror image of the painted images are adopted. They conclude by saying Velazquez wanted to paint out does the mirror which depends upon it, on the one hand, and on the other, the natural presence of the King and Queen is sustained by "the penetrating vision of their master painter" (447). It is indeed an interesting reading of the text, except that their limitation is in the fact that they are not

aware how closely their reading resembles that of Foucault. Foucault is praising Velazquez nor imputing exultation into the Spanish painter. When Snyder-Cohen declare, "Las Meninas is an audacious celebration of the painter's mastery of his art" (447), they are oblivious of the fact that the proposition does not exclude such a self-awareness on the part of the painter himself.

Their championship of the painter does not, cannot, prevent the painting to be epitome of the metapictorial signification traced, if not accurately but nonetheless meaningfully, by Foucault and Searle, respectively.

For all the differences my own reading of the picture holds over against these by Foucault, Searle, and Snyder-Cohen, for that matter, it may equally be plausible to see from my own point of view the play of significations of the physical by the intentions of the subject *Las Meninas*. It is only because the realist illusion works with the similar assumption as the one imputed to Velazquez by Snyder-Cohen:

The luminous image in the mirror appears to reflect the king and queen themselves, but it does more than just this: the mirror outdoes nature. The mirror image is only a reflection. A reflection of what? Of *the real thing*— of the art of Velazquez. In the presence of his divinely ordained monarchs...Velazquez exults in his artistry.... (447. Emphasis added.)

In the terrain of literary representations, from Richardson's first person point of view through the third person narrative of Jane Austen's novels, which is more sophisticated in their handling of free indirect and speeches, and to the return of the realist illusion rests solely on the spectator's participation as a half-ignorant but a sympathetic promoter of its fictional scheme to enhance the joy of turning the physical into the intentional signs to be deciphered— joy of knowing the superiority of the new version of representation. The triumphant narrative consciousness in such novels as *The Tale of the Scow* and *Masie Knew*, not to mention the stories like "The Real Thing," "The Liar," "The Author of Beltraffio", for instance, is exemplary of the triumphant realist illusion. When Foucault said about *Las Meninas*

Here, the action of representation consists in bringing one of these two forms of invisibility [that of the reflection of the royal couple, and that of the couple outside the scope of the painting] into the place of the painting, an unstable superimposition—and in rendering them both, at the same moment, at the other extremity of the picture—at the pole which is the very height of its

It was singular perhaps after this that Maisie never put a question about Mr Perriam, and it was still more singular that by the end of a week she knew all she didn't ask. What she most particularly knew—and the information came to her, unsought, straight from Mrs. Wix—was that Sir Claude wouldn't at all care for the visits of a millionaire who was in and out of the upper rooms. How little he would care was proved by the fact that under the sense of them Mrs Wix's discretion broke down altogether; she was capable of a transfer of allegiance, capable, propriety,—

of a desperate sacrifice of her ladyship. (75)

The adult comic irony as interpretant is the authorial point of view, while the reflector's consciousness is shown to be source of light, even as the Infanta's eye occupies the center reflection on the invisible mirror. /

Those readers who fail to read the perspective of irony verging on sarcasm may shed a few drops of salt water over the pathos of the *innocent knowledge* of the precocious. But no one helps her, for she is on a representational network under the intentional valorization to which she monopolizes the key—

(My face was turned from the first to the idea of representation—that of the gain of charm, interest, mystery, dignity, distinction, gain of importance in fine, on the part of the represented thing (over the thing of actuality, still unappropriated;) but in the house of representation the many chambers, each with its own lock, and long was to be the bus sorting and trying the keys.⁷

Notes

1. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*

(1971; New York: Vintage Books, 1994) 3-16.

2. Joel Snyder and Ted Cohen, "Reflexions on Las Meninas," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (Winter 1980): 429-447.

3. John Searle, "Las Meninas and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation," *Critical Inquiry* 6 (Spring 1980): 477-488.

4. Henry James, "The Turn of the Screw" *The Novels and Tales of Henry James: New York Edition* vol. XII New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908, p. 309.

5. See Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976) 69-72.

6. Henry James, "What Maisie Knew" *The Novels and Tales of Henry James: New York Edition* vol. XI New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908, pp. 93-94.

7. Henry James, *A Small Boy and Others* (1913; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941) p. 263.

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